

PARTY OPPOSITION PERPETUALLY ON THE VERGE OF PROMISE – SOUTH AFRICA'S ELECTION 2009

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ABSTRACT

National and provincial elections in South Africa, 1994 to 2009, became characterised by elusive opposition party quests to dent the electoral dominance of the African National Congress (ANC). There was ebb and flow in the fortunes of both continuous and new opposition parties as they rallied to capture significant electoral ground from the ANC. In this setting, the article poses the question whether Election 2009 delivered evidence of 'game-breaking' performances by opposition parties – feats that dented or showed the potential to harm the ANC's commanding electoral majorities. The answer, explored in detail in the analysis, is ambiguous. On the one hand, the 2009 election trends show hitherto unimagined lapses in ANC performance. On the other, the opposition parties were continuously unable to make profound electoral imprints. The ANC suffered certain setbacks, but retained commanding majorities. Explanatory factors include the serial organisational lapses of old and new opposition initiatives, along with the existence of a powerful parallel non-electoral world of democracy and opposition in South Africa – a world in which opposition politics is enacted within the ANC Tripartite Alliance, and between the ANC and citizens in the between-election periods. The ANC's ability to conduct redeeming election campaigns also helps it to retain its status as 'chosen' governing party, while further sealing the fate of opposition parties, from one election to the next. Hence, election 2009 delivered changes in the ANC-opposition party power ratio – symbolising a turning point, with the ANC having moved beyond its electoral peak yet falling short of assuming a watershed-change character.

INTRODUCTION

By courtesy of competitive, legitimate, free and fair elections, South Africa had, since 1999, been considered a consolidated multiparty democracy. Multiparty elections were regularised and legitimate. There was little doubt that support for the overwhelmingly dominant ANC was anchored in true popular endorsement. South African multiparty democracy therefore was consolidated (see Suttner 2004; Lodge 1999), yet with party opposition remaining serially unable to break the ANC's hegemonic-dominant hold over multiparty, electoral politics. Opposition parties remained well below any threshold that could be considered to pose a threat to ANC dominance (see Sandbrook 1996; Lemon 2007). Election 2009 sustained this trend, albeit with opposition party performances – enabled by lapses in ANC accomplishments – that suggested that an erosion of blanket ANC dominance may have set in.

Initially, the election of 22 April 2009 held promise for opposition parties that none of South Africa's preceding three democratic elections (27 (26-29) April 1994, 2 June 1999 and 14 April 2004) had done. The Congress of the People (Cope), which had split off the ANC, was at first expected to make substantial inroads into the ANC support base. Cope had arisen 'from the loins of the ANC' (Jordan 2008) and appeared destined to inherit some of the ANC's popular legitimacy. An opposition party seemed to have emerged, 15 years into multiparty democracy, which could dent the ANC by accessing the same demographic-racial-class support base. The Democratic Alliance (DA), now in its tenth year as main national opposition party, was simultaneously closing in on the ANC in the Western Cape.

These were, however, no pincer grips on the juggernaut ANC. While the Cope threat largely faded under the weight of ANC 'fight-back' to regain support and esteem, and the DA was advancing below the racial ceiling of party political support in South Africa, the ANC made face-saving breakthroughs in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The KwaZulu-Natal feat veiled evidence that the ANC had, in all likelihood, moved beyond its peak of electoral fortitude. On several fronts there were slippages, albeit not collapses.

The article first elaborates aspects of the core argument of tentative changes in the party political and opposition landscapes, assessed in the context of *non-electoral and non-party opposition* to the ANC as party and government. It then positions the current analysis in relation to the literature on contemporary party politics and opposition in South Africa. Thereafter it focuses on the details of the overall 2009 election results (as reviewed in Table 1). It weighs up party gains and losses on national and provincial levels and identifies inter-party support movements. This part of the analysis includes a comparison of the Cope phenomenon with those of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and the

Independent Democrats (ID), the respective new opposition party 'hopes' of the two preceding elections. It explores the DA's advances, especially as evidenced in the Western Cape. Opposition party performances are then linked to the ANC's feats in Election 2009, since the ANC continued to be central to the explanation of the opposition parties' lack of breakthrough. The final section reviews the contradictions within the ANC's continuously strong electoral performances and links these to prospects for opposition advances.

OPPOSITION AND PARTY POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, CIRCA 2009

Solely in electoral terms, Election 2009 presented concurrent evidence of opposition party advances (on the national and some provincial levels) and of the ANC retaining a commanding majoritarian presence. The ANC's continuous national-level performance of close to two-thirds was facilitated by its convincing conquest of KwaZulu-Natal, which compensated for it having shrunk proportionately, in relation to the opposition, in the other eight provinces. Here opposition advances pushed the ANC back and marked an important contrast with the opposition parties' cumulative national-level *shrinkage* in the preceding two elections (compared with their 1994 standing). For the ANC this indicated possible future problems, yet no crisis. Relatively minor variations in the party's electoral support also did not have a substantial impact on its close-to-full command of the South African state. The opposition parties, at best, were pushing the ANC marginally below a two-thirds national majority.

Non-electoral challenges to opposition parties

Opposition achievement in South Africa depends on both electoral and between-election dynamics. For South Africa's opposition parties to proclaim advances at the time of Election 2009 they would thus have had to dent significantly the ANC's electoral base, *and*, in the broader between-election period and non-electoral domain, conquer the powerful ANC-citizenry dynamic and then establish party political opposition as the 'only [opposition] game in town' (see O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, pp 51-61).

The *two-worlds* phenomenon was a major between-election obstacle to opposition advances. This is the world in which popular opposition to the ANC is vibrant, but then recedes as national elections approach, with the broad base of ANC supporters fighting in unison against some or another party political enemy (Booyesen 2009a, 2009b). The *parallel democracy* trend in South African politics equally undermined opposition initiatives. Here, reference is to continuous and vibrant intra-Tripartite Alliance contestation, which often substituted for inter-

party contestation. Non-electoral, intra-alliance exchanges fulfilled an opposition role of contesting ideas and policies. The citizenry in the between-election periods regularly exercised opposition through protest against ANC government, yet would return the ANC to the polls come election times. Third, the '*extended grace*' trend highlights the existence of a voting population that had not yet started to penalise the ANC electorally, in any substantive and nationally evident way, for sub-optimal performance in government. As it turned out, these phenomena contributed strongly to thwarted opposition quests in 2009.

Hence, opposition party politics was not the only opposition game in town. The ANC's two Tripartite Alliance partners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), remained at the centre of 'opposition politics'. The ANC Youth League (ANCYL) in this period also contested for oppositional space to the 'main ANC', alongside Cosatu and the SACP.¹ It was within this heart of power, the extended Tripartite Alliance, that many of the policy and succession contests *that mattered* unfolded. Party politics was an important yet separate show – relatively marginalised from this axis. In the between-election periods, particularly also in the periods before and after Election 2009, opposition politics was effectively realised *non-electorally* through the two alliance partners, Cosatu and the SACP.

Come national election times intra-alliance opposition tended to dissipate and all partners and their followers would once again unite against a chosen principal party political opponent. This opponent was the National Party (NP) in 1994, the Democratic Party (DP) in 1999, DP successor the Democratic Alliance (DA) in 2004 and the DA-Cope in 2009. In the 2009-2010 post-election period there were several instances of acrimonious ANC-Cosatu/SACP contestation.² The intensity of this opposition was suspected to have been increasing, especially in the presence of the ANCYL's ascent in the post-Polokwane period. In the aftermath of Election 2009, and escalating towards mid-2010, the Tripartite Alliance was vulnerable in its divisions, for example on elite enrichment and public sector

1 The debate between the SACP's Jeremy Cronin and the ANCYL's Julius Malema about nationalisation was an illustration of this phenomenon (see, eg, Cronin 2009 and Cronin/Malema 2009). The contest was linked to 2009 post-election expressions of interest in succession to senior ANC positions. The ANCYL then used organisational and policy positioning to try to ensure that SACP and union-associated current ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe might only serve one term – and vacate his position in favour of former ANCYL president and ANC 2009 campaign manager, Fikile Mbalula. Also see Monare 2009. It was a fluid process and remains in flux at the time of writing.

2 In a notable instance Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi named two Cabinet members as guilty of corruption due to tender advantages and living a high life off taxpayers and at the cost of the poor. The ANC at first threatened disciplinary action, but then decided not to proceed. For an overview, see Mbanjwa 2009. Both the accusations and counter-actions at the time suggested that intra-alliance fallout was intensifying. However, it remained possible that the differences would be settled (at least for the time being) through alliance summits and council meetings. This was a typical way of addressing intra-alliance differences in the Zuma era.

corruption. Yet little evidence emerged that it was spiralling out of control and that an ANC split would result, ready for the picking by an opposition-alliance-in-the-making.³

Party political opposition also played out among South African voters exercising a dual repertoire of protest against and discontent with the predominant governing party in the *between-election periods*, which combined with pro-ANC mobilisation and unification against some or another opposition party enemy, *come election time* (Booyesen 2007, 2009c; also see Sachs 2004). Elections, time after time, brought the bulk of the mobilised electorate to restate their ANC support. Until at least 2009 elections were not the time and place of reckoning for an under-performing ANC.

On the one level, Election 2009 thus brought the opposition political parties to a seeming impasse. It delivered evidence of the ANC having moved past its electoral peak and of opposition party inroads, even if these were still scattered and relatively insubstantial. This was while the governing ANC, on another level and by now more than 15 years into multiparty democracy, appeared set to remain electorally dominant.

Enthusiasm for party politics in the world of elections

The relative peripheralisation of party political opposition politics in South Africa contrasts with the proliferation of political parties – all, by definition, *opposition parties*, in the prevailing epoch. The number of political parties in South Africa increased over the years, from around 70 in the late 1990s to 146 in late March 2008 and 157 in September 2008 (Tlakula 2008; Electoral Commission 2008, p 39; also see Spies 2009). Reasons for the high numbers included both enthusiasm for the act of, especially, electoral participation and the fact that it is easy and inexpensive to start a political party in South Africa. In terms of the Electoral Commission Act No 51 of 1995 unrepresented parties are simply required to renew their annual registration before 31 January of any particular year.

Even if small and with generally dismal prospects of ascending to government, South Africa's opposition parties that contested elections relished the participation and competition. On the floor of the Electoral Commission's Pretoria results centre, for example, these parties, election after election, rejoiced if they had advanced decimally, managed to survive one more election, or established a miniscule foothold in Parliament (Booyesen 1999-2009). In addition there was a multiplicity of minor parties that failed to achieve any representation

3 It has been a long-standing scholarly-activist advocacy project that the alliance needs to split, and that this would be the ultimate trigger for a strong opposition to emerge. For example, see Habib & Taylor 1999.

whatsoever, either in single or in consecutive elections, both nationally and provincially.

There is a vivid de-escalation in South Africa between the numbers of registered, participating and represented political parties. To illustrate, at the time of Election 2009 there were (see Booysen & Masterson 2009) more than 118 parties registered at national level, only four of them earning more than 4 per cent of the national vote. The 2009 details include:

- 156 registered political parties (118 of them registered at national level);
- 40 parties in total participating in elections (national *and* provincial);
- 26 parties contesting parliamentary elections (for the National Assembly);
- 13 parties winning representation in the National Assembly (two of them, Cope and the Pan Africanist Congress – PAC – split-off, the African People’s Convention – APC – were first-time contestants);
- 9 of the 13 parties represented in the National Assembly winning 1 per cent or less of the national vote (the comparative figures in the preceding three elections were 8 in 1994, 12 in 1999 and 11 in 2004);
- 4 parties only in the National Assembly winning more than 4 per cent of the national vote (ANC, DA, Cope and the Inkatha Freedom Party – IFP).

Cumulative opposition inroads, 2009

As the mirror image of this array of modestly- and non-performing opposition parties, the ANC in the first three democratic elections (1994, 1999 and 2004) continuously grew its proportion of the vote (also see below, regarding 2009 slippage). Nationally, from 1994 to 2004 the ANC rose from 62.6 to 66.5 to 69.7 per cent of turnout. Across the four democratic elections up to 2009, although not precipitously, the party’s proportion of the vote of the total of eligible voters simultaneously declined, going from 53.8 (in 1994, the only one of the four elections not based on a voters’ roll) to 46.9, 39.6 and 38.8 per cent of the national vote (Table 1; Schulz-Herzenberg 2009, p 25). There was gradual change, although opposition parties remained in an overall dismal zone, their joint support ranging between 30 and 37 per cent.

Come Election 2009, two results barriers tumbled. Although fleeting in the context of the party’s 2009-10 post-election turmoil, Cope had made inroads into ANC voter blocs. Previously, in post-1994 South Africa all opposition parties had

faltered in this quest. Largely as a result of the Cope performance, the ANC in 2009 was pushed back over a relatively wide front. The ANC now returned to its 1999 level of national support – rescued by its KwaZulu-Natal result.

The rest of South Africa’s represented opposition parties had either gone into relentless decline or had stagnated in the below-1 per cent national bracket (Table 2). Most precipitous was the IFP’s slide from 11 to 9 to 7 to 5 per cent of national support from 1994 to 2009 (also see Mottiar 2004). In the process it was provincially eclipsed by the ANC. The UDM declined from 3 to 2 to 1 per cent, and the ID from 2 to 1 per cent. The PAC stagnated below 1 per cent, and the Freedom Front (Freedom Front Plus after its absorption of the Conservative Party – CP) went from a 2 per cent to three consecutive 1 per cent performances. The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) vacillated between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent over four elections. The Bophuthatswana Bantustan relic party, the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP), was doomed to the below 1 per cent mark after its 1999 ‘comeback’. These mostly dismal fates of the ‘bigger’ opposition parties – bigger in the sense of at least having won national representation – did not douse the enthusiasm of many a new political party to contest the elections. In the proportional representation (PR) electoral system at provincial and national levels opposition splintering did not detract from cumulative opposition performance vis-à-vis the ANC.

Table 1
Comparative turnout over four South African elections

Vote & voter category	Year of election			
	1994	1999	2004	2009
Turnout percentage of registered voters	No registration or voters’ roll	89.3	76.73	77.3
Valid votes cast	19 533 498	15 977 142	15 612 671	17 680 729
Number of spoilt ballots	189 475	251 320	250 887	239 237
Total number of votes	19 533 498	16 228 320	15 863 558	18 159 203
Total number of registered voters*	No registration or voters’ roll	18 172 751	20 674 926	23 181 997

Estimated voting age population*	22 709 152	22 589 369	27 436 819	29 956 957
ANC's percentage of VAP vote~	53.8	46.9	39.6	38.8
Percentage VAP registered*	No registration or voters' roll	80.4	75.4	77.3
Percentage turnout of VAP*	86.0	71.8	57.8	59.8

Sources: Compiled by author from www.iec.org.za, range of windows for respective elections; Reynolds 1999; rows marked with (*) from Southall & Daniel (eds.), 2009: 234; row marked with (~) from Schulz-Herzenberg 2009, p 25

SOUTH AFRICAN OPPOSITION PARTY RESEARCH IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

Opposition party research in South Africa is predominantly concentrated in published volumes on the state of the individual parties, come election times and the days of reckoning that election results bring. These edited compilations have been produced after each of South Africa's four sets of national and provincial elections (see Reynolds 1994; Reynolds 1999; Piombo & Nijzink, 2004; Southall & Daniel 2009).

The approach in the earlier volumes had been to gather party protagonists, along with a handful of academics and researchers who had been associated with scholarship on a particular party. By 2004 the approach had converted to full scholarship orientation (see Piombo & Nijzink 2004). This was largely sustained in 2009 (see Southall & Daniel 2009). The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's (2001) *Opposition in South Africa's new democracy* was in the same genre. In extending this scholarship, Hamill (2004) goes some way towards capturing the relations between the dominant ANC and the opposition parties. Yet, the works capture insufficiently the pathos of opposition party politics failing to progress substantially in relation to the ANC in successive elections.

The work on the individual opposition parties is illuminating, yet relatively scarce. Illustrations are the work of Francis (2008) in a doctoral study that explores the IFP in provincial government, and Van der Westhuizen (2007), collecting the details of the decline of the NP, in a post-disappearance review. More historically, there was the definitive work by O'Meara (1996) on the NP, positioning the party in broad historical context. The floor-crossing studies (Booyesen 2005) captured important trends pertaining both to the gains of the main parties and

the mushrooming of factional and new micro-parties, but are not presented in an analytical framework that focuses on the election-related nuances of opposition stagnation or gains vis-à-vis the ANC. Similarly, authors such as Murphy & Blair (2009) investigate the correlates of low opposition party influence in South Africa – and relate the phenomenon, perhaps obviously, to electoral weakness and (some) parties' preparedness to be co-opted by the ruling party. Scholarship also tends to box party political studies either into opposition studies or into investigations into the ANC and its alliance relations – instead of considering these in an integrated manner.

The sprinkling of works on opposition parties contrasts with an extensive literature on the ANC, in both books and scholarly articles. Many of the works on the ANC are of an historical nature and capture it in exile and underground times. They are written by insiders, insider-scholars, and outsider-scholars (see Suttner 2003, 2004, 2008; Maharaj 2008; Shubin 1999; Dubow 2000; Ellis & Sechaba 1992). More contemporary work has often come from political scientists, especially Lodge (2004a, 2004b, 2005), with Butler (2007, 2009) also contributing.

Bond (2004a, 2004b, 2006) is prolific on the ANC, mostly offering insights into the socio-economy and contexts of party politics and voting in relation to it. Gumede (2008) and Feinstein (2007) delivered critical perspectives on the party, the latter from the vantage point of personal experience. The biographical work of Gevisser (2008) on Mbeki offers substantial insights into the character and operations of the ANC. There is a considerable literature on the Tripartite Alliance and policy contestation amongst the left partners (for example, McKinley 2008; Sachs 2007; Suttner 2007). However, these studies do not position the contestation alongside the competition of opposition parties in and around elections.

Some of the literature takes stock of the broader party political landscape (see Southall & Daniel 2009). Southall (2003) also places opposition politics and alliance politics side-by-side – with particular reference to ANC dominance. Southall & Daniel's 2009 work counter-positions the ANC and other political parties, yet without any systematic exploration of the dynamics of opposition politics. Other collective works too, such as the successive *State of the Nation* edited volumes, take stock of party politics in South Africa in general (Southall & Daniel 2005; also see Lodge & Scheidegger 2006). Suttner (2004) delivers useful analyses on this front, through his counter-positioning of the scholarship of one-party dominance with South African society's openness to civil society contestation.

Facets of the literature also dwell on the reasons why South Africans vote the way they do. The expositions range from the 'racial census' thesis to 'party image' (Schulz-Herzenberg 2009; also see Ferree 2006; Habib & Naidu 2006). Foremost among the reasons why South Africans continued to support the ANC overwhelmingly were the ANC's credibility of identification with, and

representation of the interests of the majority of, especially, black-African South Africans. Credible leadership and egalitarian policies contributed.

The ANC's liberation movement legacy added major impact, helping to sustain popular belief in the party's *bona fides* in the presence of a rising Gini coefficient, inordinate unemployment, widespread poverty, weak (and sometimes corrupt) governance and corruption or maladministration in high leadership circles. No matter how weak and incapable the ANC appeared, many South Africans had been experiencing improvements in conditions and continued to harbour high expectations. To the mass of the South African voters the opposition parties had less credibility than the ANC, as evidenced in the overwhelming absence of vote switching.

The current analysis strives to take stock, circa 2009-10, to detect trends and project trajectories on the unfolding power relations between the main opposition parties and the governing party – while recognising that opposition party politics is challenged in opposition roles by the ANC's alliance partners, and thus that electoral opposition politics is not the only opposition game in town. Civil society and social movement opposition to the ANC is recognised as a sidebar to the primary gist of the analysis. The analysis thus tracks opposition party trends across the four democratic elections, in relation to the 'other opposition games in town'. The main emphasis is on the national landscape, albeit with references to significant trends in the political parties' provincial results.

OPPOSITION REALIGNMENT AND THE 'GREAT OPPOSITION HOPES' OF 1999, 2004 AND 2009

New parties and new party coalition formations in South Africa's first 16 years of multiparty democracy elicited substantial pre-election enthusiasm ... and almost inevitably bigger election-post-election modesty. South Africa's opposition parties have invariably fallen short of plans and expectations.

Joint opposition party performance up to Election 2009 hovered around 30 to 37 per cent of the voting electorate. This was neither the result of a lack of new political parties emerging nor of inattention to alliances and cooperation agreements. In the latter game the ANC appeared to outplay the opposition when it struck a deal with the New National Party (NNP) – although mostly in terms of symbolical value after the DA had the first-round pickings in its failed DP-NNP venture.

New initiatives were realised in the form of realignment by electoral or other alliances (for example the DP and IFP), mergers (for example the DP and NNP), absorption into more successful parties (the NNP into the ANC), splits off the ANC (UDM, Cope), and parties formed in the era of floor crossing through splits

from bigger parties (for example the ID and APC off the PAC and a multiplicity of micro parties that failed to survive electoral exposure).

After the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1994 the main party opposition force switched from the NP (1994), to the small DP (1999), and then to the Democratic Alliance (DA; DP as bolstered by the merger with the NNP).⁴ Along with the slim growth realised by the DA, the DA jointly with the ID and UDM support of 2009 would only just approximate the old NP's 1994 support level of 20 per cent. It was only Cope that had managed to make convincing inroads into the ANC base – but then it effectively imploded in the aftermath of Election 2009 and, for the time being, relinquished its value to a possible new opposition alliance.⁵

The rest of the section explores the new opposition parties compared with the steadily growing DA, and specifically considers Cope as the most recent manifestation of a potential game-breaker in opposition politics in South Africa.

DA advances but encounters ceilings

The DP-DA was the only South African opposition party that had consistently, albeit modestly, grown across the three post-1994 elections. By 2008-09 it had set its sights on capturing the Western Cape, part of a strategy of piecemeal inroads into ANC bases.⁶ The Western Cape was projected as the bulwark of advancing DA forces. The DA's dual feats of being the opposition party that was most consistently growing and the party that managed to take the Western Cape from the ANC, however, remained hemmed in. Vote analyses of 2009 show that the DA's Western Cape victory was anchored in the combination of a larger turnout of white voters and coloured working-class switches from the ANC to the DA (Kimmie, Greben & Booysen 2010) in times of intense ANC in-fighting and turmoil in the province.

The DA's Western Cape advance thus appeared to have limited cross-provincial potential. In the sparsely populated Northern Cape, a province with a strong white-coloured demographic voter base (on occasion referred to as the next fertile territory for DA provincial advances), the ANC, in 2009, increased its vote total, yet suffered an 8 per cent decline in vote proportion. The ANC had

4 The NNP had again parted ways with the DA, after the merger soured. Yet a substantial proportion of NNP followers remained behind in the DA. The modestly sized remainder of the NNP formally merged into the ANC in the aftermath of Election 2004.

5 In 2010 the DA and ID had started to forge links, an initiative that was complicated by the absence of the floor-crossing mechanism. See Rossouw 2010.

6 For an overview of the DA's strategic approach to Election 2009, see Jolobe 2009.

anchored its high profile campaign on ANC provincial government delivery (Makatees 2009). Its relative vote losses were due more to Cope than to the DA.

Table 2
South Africa's four-election history of comparative opposition-versus-ANC performances

	ELECTIONS & RESULTS OF ALL PARTIES WINNING REPRESENTATION			
	1994	1999	2004	2009
Party	Per column: Vote percentage (%) / Number of National Assembly seats / Number of votes			
ANC	62.65% / 252 / 12 237 655	66.35% / 266 / 10 601 330	69.69% / 279 / 10 880 915	65.90% / 264 / 11 650 648
DP / DA	1.73% 7 338 426	9.56% 38 1 527 337	12.37% / 50 / 1 931 201	16.66% / 67 / 2 945 829
Cope	–	–	–	7.42% / 30 / 1 311 027
IFP	10.54% / 43 / 2 058 294	8.58% / 34 / 1 371 477	6.97% / 28 / 1 088 664	4.55% / 18 / 804 260
ID	–	–	1.73% / 7 / 269 765	0.92% / 4 / 162 915
UDM	–	3.42% / 14 / 546 790	2.28% / 9 / 355 717	0.85% / 4 / 149 680
FF / FF+	2.17% / 9 / 424 555	0.80% / 3 / 127 217	0.89% / 4 / 139 465	0.84% / 4 / 146 796
ACDP	0.45% / 2 / 88 104	1.43% / 6 / 228 975	1.60% / 7 / 250 272	0.81% / 3 / 142 658
UCDP	–	0.785% / 3 / 125 280	0.75% / 3 / 117 792	0.37% / 2 / 66 086
PAC	1.25% / 5 / 243 478	0.71% / 3 / 113 125	0.73% / 3 / 113 512	0.27% / 1 / 48 530
MF	0.07% / 0 / 13 433	0.30% / 1 / 48 277	0.35% / 2 / 55 267	0.25% / 1 / 43 474
Azapo	–	0.17% / 1 / 27 257	0.25% / 1 / 39 116	0.22% / 1 / 38 245

APC	–	–	–	0.20% / 1 / 35 867
NP/ NNP	20.39% / 82 / 3 983 690	6.87% / 28 / 1 098 215	1.65% / 7 / 257 824	–
FA	–	0.54% / 2 / 86 704	–	–
AEB	–	0.29% / 1 / 46 292	–	–
TOTAL	100% / 400 / 19 533 498	100% / 400 / 15 977 142	100% / 400 / 15 612 671	100% / 400 / 17 680 729
<p>Key to abbreviations: ANC, African National Congress; DP/DA, Democratic Party / Alliance; Cope, Congress of the People; IFP, Inkatha Freedom Party; ID, Independent Democrats; UDM, United Democratic Movement; FF/FF+, Freedom Front/Plus; ACDP, African Christian Democratic Party; UCDP, United Christian Democratic Party; PAC, Pan Africanist Congress; MF, Minority Front; Azapo, Azanian People's Organisation; APC, African People's Convention; N/ NP, New/National Party; FA, Federal Alliance; AEB, Afrikaner Eenheidsbeweging (Unity Movement)</p>				

Sources: Compiled by author, based on IEC 1994; Electoral Commission 1999, 2004, 2008, 2009

The DA's advances were also characterised by it feeding off other opposition parties rather than making inroads into the ANC's vote (Table 3). The main party political sources of the DA's 2009 national-level growth were, in declining order, the defunct NNP (which made its last electoral appearance in 2004), the ID, then the ACDP, closely followed by the ANC as only the fourth most-important source (Table 3). The DA's local level advances in municipal by-elections in 2010 followed, yet still with uncertainty as to whether they would have widespread local or provincial-national transfer value.

In contrast to the DP-DA, first the UDM, and subsequently Cope, was seen to have the potential to break through the white (multi-class) and coloured (mainly working-class) ceilings that were restraining the DP-DA. The UDM, ID and Cope were the three potential game-breakers of the elections of 1999, 2004 and 2009. Whereas none of the three had fulfilled the expectations that prevailed at the time of their respective births, it was Cope, more than its two counterparts, that demonstrated that it could pull support roughly proportionately across the 'racial groups' of South Africa and access the black-African working (and sub-working) class vote (Kimmie, Greben & Booysen 2010). In Election 2009 it was also only Cope that inflicted electoral damage on the ANC.

Emergence of the potential game-breakers

Three new opposition parties that could potentially ‘break the game’ of overwhelming ANC dominance, and hence South Africa’s opposition party gridlock, stepped into the election arena in the course of the three national elections after 1994. They were the UDM in 1999, the ID in 2004, and Cope in 2009. Their game-breaking potential came either through the expectations of their holding the wand to split the ANC vote (UDM and Cope, albeit with a difference of scale), or by providing a struggle-anchored alternative party presence (ID, through its PAC origins). The scale of break-through, however, remained meek. The rest of the section considers these ‘special’ parties, against the background of general party political developments.

Election 1994 and beyond

South Africa’s multiparty democracy began in 1994, with four main groupings of political parties contesting and winning representation (Booyesen 2009b). First, there were the parties linked to the liberation struggle (especially the ANC and PAC); second, parties representing the spectrum of white interests (ranging from nationalist in the form of the NP, to liberal in the DP); and, third, other racially defined tricameral and Bantustan parties. Fourth, there was also a range of small ethnically and religiously defined parties. Only a tiny fraction of these would win representation and survive into the next round of elections. Post-election transformation and realignment followed in all these groupings. Most of the Bantustan parties disappeared in the years following Election 1994. Others metamorphosed into post-apartheid parties. In ‘white’ party politics, the NP had built up a substantial coloured following, but nevertheless became eroded. Local government by-elections from the mid-1990s onwards indicated realignment away from the NP/NNP towards the DP.

Election 1999 and beyond

Opposition in Election 1999 was the confirmation of the decline of the (by then renamed) *New National Party* (NNP) and the ascent of the DP, and the emergence of ANC split-off, the UDM under former Bantustan leader-supportive-of-the-ANC-in-exile, Bantu Holomisa (also see ANC, 1997, 2001). The DP had captured an increased white base through its so-called fight-back campaign, often interpreted as reactionary (see Jolobe 2009). It simultaneously maintained and consolidated the support of the English liberal section of the ruling bloc, which had exercised its power primarily through business, capital and the media (see *Umrabulo* 2001). Election 1999 anointed the DP as the new official opposition.

The DP nevertheless remained tiny and the quest continued to find a game-breaker in opposition ranks. A faction that split off the NNP, under constitutional negotiator and previously ascendant NP leader, Roelf Meyer, joined forces with Holomisa to constitute the UDM. Hailed as the first post-apartheid non-racial party it won support off the ANC, especially in the Eastern Cape, but failed to establish a significant national presence. Secondary opposition shifts included the shift in conservative white-Afrikaner politics away from the separatist Volkstaat to securing white interests within the Republic of South Africa. This was illustrated in the decline of the Freedom Front and other far right-wing parties. The IFP started losing former enclaves of support beyond KwaZulu-Natal. In the absence of outright majorities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape the ANC established provincial coalition governments with the IFP (in KZN) and the NNP (in the Western Cape).

The rapid further collapse of the NNP from 1999 onwards then became the major stimulant of opposition party realignment. It dared not enter the 2000 local government elections under its own steam and hence leapt into a fusion arrangement with the DP. The alignment soon soured. The ANC sensed the opportunity to extract and capture a portion of the NNP vote from this opposition alliance. The DA split, yet retained the bulk of its NNP following and floor crossing resulted (Booyesen 2005). The phenomenon helped the ANC to establish close-to-full hegemony across the national and provincial legislative institutions. On the eve of Election 2009 the ANC, by virtue of floor crossing, had accumulated 74.25 per cent or 297 of the 400 National Assembly representatives. Floor crossing persisted until 2008 and was officially abandoned in early 2009.

Election 2004 and beyond

Floor crossing set the scene for several variations on opposition realignment. In Election 2004 it was a floor-crossing party, the ID, that fulfilled the role of new-blood opposition hope. Under Patricia de Lille the ID delivered fair performances in Election 2004, clearly with a core of support from the coloured voting blocs in the Western and Northern Cape provinces, but failed to assert itself nationally. Floor crossing remained the primary opposition party dynamic until the ANC's succession struggles took over the momentum.

Party political opposition shifted to the political margins as the ANC fought out its National General Council meeting of 2005, the Policy Conference of mid-2007 and the Polokwane Elective Conference of late-2007. ANC contestation for the marginalisation of Thabo Mbeki and the ascent of Jacob Zuma now effectively eclipsed party political opposition. Tripartite Alliance partners vied for control and influence, mobilising in favour of the ascendant Zuma faction (see Fikeni

2008). The next grand party political opposition moment came in 2008 when the Polokwane divisions advanced to the removal of Mbeki from the presidency of South Africa. The party that was to become known as Cope split off the ANC, with the Cope hopefuls believing that the roughly 40 per cent support for Mbeki at Polokwane could be converted into electoral support (Booyesen 2009d).

Election 2009 onwards

Opposition in Election 2009 was characterised by two main occurrences – the DA’s win over the ANC in the Western Cape provincial election (courtesy of a vote switch by some ‘coloured’ voting blocs, and higher turnout amongst conventional DA supporters), and Cope taking 7 per cent of the national vote (largely due to winning support from the ANC).

In the early democratic elections the Western Cape had been seen as an unliberated bastion of the *ancien régime*. Hence, it was significant for the ANC to have emerged as the largest single party in the 2004 vote tallies. While the ANC fell short of an outright majority it captured the province, with NNP aid. In the 2009 reversal the DA secured an outright provincial win. The DA’s Western Cape rise also propelled the party into its 5 per cent growth from 12 to 17 per cent of national electoral support (Table 1).

Expectations of Cope’s opposition potential (Booyesen 2009a) shrank consistently after its December 2008 launch. Cope declined from the impressionistic expectation of 40 per cent of ANC support (modelled on the Polokwane result) to its 7 per cent national performance in Election 2009. The 7 per cent result was, nevertheless, a substantial achievement, given that about 5 of these 7 percentage points had come off the ANC support base (Table 3). The 7 per cent was also enough to make Cope the third-biggest party in the National Assembly and official opposition in five of South Africa’s nine provinces – accomplishments that no other new opposition party had mustered in democratic South Africa.

Retreat of another nature faced Cope in the year after the election, when it was overwhelmed by a complex of organisational, policy-identity and leadership-factional problems. Insufficient funds,⁷ crumbling sponsorships in the wake of certainty that the ANC was not about to disintegrate, and accusations of mismanagement of its publicly allocated funds dislodged post-election Cope initiatives. As internecine leadership squabbles prevailed, the party faced organisational and financial collapse. In 2010 dual structures and dual leadership regularly took decisions by means of court rulings (see, eg, Shoba and Sapa 2010).

7 Public funding in South Africa is reserved for *represented* political parties (see EISA 2010).

One of the few escape routes for small opposition parties away from burdensome party political and representational responsibilities, the course of collaborative agreements with other opposition parties, slipped away. Collaborative initiatives had been pursued on and off from July 2009 onwards but in view of Cope's post-election disarray and seeming implosion it was left to first resolve its internal problems. Without Cope's presence in alliance talks there was little to pursue. Given its 2009 national and provincial results Cope would persist for at least its electoral term. The battle was on, however, for custody of its representation in the legislative institutions of the country.

Even though the Cope onslaught had been subdued the party affected the ANC more adversely than had been evident in the 65.9 per cent versus 7.42 per cent inter-party balance in the Election 2009 result. The five percentage points of support that Cope had won from the ANC support base (Kimmie, Greben & Booysen 2010; Table 3) represented a constituency of voters that had hitherto *not* dabbled with voting for opposition parties. The bulk of Cope's support came from urban and metropolitan communities that were economically marginalised and dissatisfied with ANC governance (Kimmie, Greben & Booysen 2010). Cope had gained this sought-after electoral 'commodity', but was uncertain what to do with it.

Cope's multi-level impact on the ANC

While the ANC had thwarted Cope's electoral challenge Cope had both a positive and an adverse impact on the ruling party, and in enduring ways. Cope was the party political effect of internal party-political fallout in the ANC and, in effect, externalised the ANC's internal problems, dragging them into the arena of liberal-democratic inter-party contestation. In its early pre-election days Cope was also an effective opposition party in that it pushed the ANC to take stock, implement corrective action, and put effort into reconnecting with the grassroots (Booyesen 2010).

The Cope experiment also inadvertently bolstered the ANC's future prospects in that Cope was the lesson for future dissidents of the way *not* to go. Individuals who split from the ANC made substantial personal sacrifices. Those who stayed with it mostly retained political mainstream status and superior career prospects. In addition, and consequent to the Cope project, the ANC could be better assured that the inclination to form future Copes would be reduced. It also helped that the ANC was clearly to remain the major custodian of career prospects and politico-economic patronage.

The Cope project, however, also sowed less favourable seeds in the ANC. Distrust within the ANC, along with internal contestation for leadership positions,

the prevalence of factions and intolerance of internal contestation, were enduring by-products of the Zuma succession struggle. Purges of real or suspected Cope sympathisers distracted and even paralysed the ANC in government.

Many whose sympathies were either with the new party or with the Mbeki agenda to suppress the rise of the Zuma ANC also remained inside the ANC (Booyesen 2009d). The Polokwane ANC elections furthermore resulted in disjunctures for many individuals who now enjoyed ANC seniority, yet had low status in government or the state bureaucracy. In the aftermath of Election 2009 the Zuma ANC – in response to Mbeki’s separation of party and state – had restated that the ANC, as majority party, rules, hence that the distances between party and state were artificial (also see Zuma 2010).

Opposition and electoral violence

Opposition parties achieved their 2009 levels of support in the context of ‘robust’ campaigning in which it was mostly (but not exclusively) they that were targeted by the ANC. The exception was in KwaZulu-Natal, where the IFP was the predominant perpetrator of electoral violence on the ANC. The three main forms of these conflicts in the early 2009 campaign period were violent, demeaning rhetoric; obstruction and intimidation; and outright violence.

Table 3
Party political origins of political parties’ 2009 election support

Parties	2009 Result %	Percentage point support obtained from								
		ANC	DA	IFP	UDM	ID	NNP	ACDP	FF+	UCDP
ANC	65.90	60.91	0.01	2.92	0.53	0.11	0.06	0.90	0.02	0.01
DA	16.60	0.61	12.28	0.01	0.10	0.96	1.33	0.62	0.34	0.03
Cope	7.41	4.61	0.98	0.02	0.59	0.41	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.19
IFP	4.55	0.00	0.00	4.26	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.02
ID	0.92	0.37	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.31	0.17	0.00	0.03	0.00
UDM	0.85	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.81	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
FF+	0.83	0.07	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.01
ACDP	0.81	0.26	0.17	0.01	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.20	0.00	0.01
UCDP	0.37	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.36

Notes: Percentages do not necessarily add up to the total in column 2, because support may also have come from more obscure parties that are not listed; the **figures in bold** indicate the parties’ proportion of vote retention – the figure may also be pushed down by growth in party support.

Source: Kimmie, Greben & Booyesen 2010 (trends based on data generated by Zaid Kimmie and Jan Greben)

The first two were relatively widespread (Booyesen 2009d), while Bam (2010) stressed that 'there was *a lot* of violence in this election'. In South Africa's early pre-election period, from 2008-9, this repertoire of party actions challenged several of the properties that Elklit & Svensson (1997) link to 'free and fair'.

The impact of the robust campaign actions lingered, turning the subsequent, *more* free and fair phase (the formal 2009 campaign period, from proclamation in early March onwards) into a terrain that had retained an intimidatory character, despite the era of untoward behaviour largely having passed in the final six weeks of campaigning. As the elections were formally promulgated and sanctioning of untoward party actions took hold, violence largely receded. Interventions helped turn the tide. In addition, the ANC had, by now, sufficiently attained the objectives of subduing Cope and could afford to move into a mode of higher political tolerance.

ANC vulnerabilities in Election 2009

Opposition party performances constitute the mirror image of the ANC's continuous and hegemonic strength in party politics in South Africa. As a result ANC vulnerabilities and lapses constitute potential opportunities for the growth of party political opposition. This section assesses the manifestation of ANC weaknesses and continuous strengths in Election 2009 in the context of lapses which offered the potential for opposition advances.

The ANC has been a party of undisputed electoral prowess. In four elections it overpowered all other established and new political parties, continuously emerging with national electoral majorities over 63 per cent, ranging up to 70 per cent. It dealt with a range of opposition party challenges, displacing the PAC in 1994 and overseeing its disappearance as a credible political party (also see Dubow 2000, p 107); defeating the NP in 1994 by a ratio of more than three to one, dwarfing the DP in 1999 and subsequently absorbing the NNP. It showed that new opposition parties such as the UDM, ID and Cope might once have captured popular imagination but were under-qualified to pose national-level electoral threats.

In 2009, while deflecting Cope, the ANC also accomplished its mission of establishing definitive ANC dominance in KwaZulu-Natal, the IFP's provincial heartland. The achievements were even more significant given that the ANC had overwhelmingly competed fairly and the electorate was in a position to exercise an 'uncoerced' electoral choice – despite also dishing out 'robust campaigning'. ANC dominance in such conditions meant that elections remained meaningful, despite guaranteed national-level victories for the party (also see Suttner 2004).

These achievements notwithstanding, Election 2009's national and provincial result trends revealed multiple vulnerabilities in the ANC armour – where in

preceding elections there had been far fewer. It also reveals some contradictions. The rest of the section considers the main contradictions and revealed vulnerabilities against the background reality of continuously commanding ANC national and provincial support levels. The contradictions nevertheless suggest that better prospects for greater party political competition might be budding. For opposition parties to realise such potential, however, they would have to counter their own weaknesses and simultaneously displace intra-alliance and civil society contestation as the mainstays of opposing the ANC.

Scope of the ANC's 2009 decline

In the context of the ANC's consistent 'electoral colossus' status all setbacks would be significant. These include its modest national-level decline from Election 2004 to Election 2009. Its overall level of national support of 65.90 per cent was 4 per cent lower than the 69.69 per cent of 2004. This still-formidable result followed the ANC's mobilisational and populist election campaign (see Drew 2009; Uys & Trewhela 2009).⁸ Yet, nationally, the party's losses were relatively contained, courtesy of its hugely improved performance in KwaZulu-Natal, which was largely due to the result in the metropolitan eThekweni (Francis 2009).

In contrast with the decreases in vote proportions in the other eight provinces, the populous KwaZulu-Natal delivered a 16 per cent rise in electoral support, giving the ANC a provincial increase of 904 693 votes – the backbone of its continuously credible national election performance.

The fact that the ANC's national-level percentage loss was contained through the outstanding performance in *one* province suggested a hitherto unknown fragility. Calculations show that had the party's performance in KwaZulu-Natal remained at its 2004 level, and had opposition parties roughly gained their 2009 KwaZulu-Natal proportions the ANC's national level of support would have been closer to 60 than to 65 per cent.

Below the surface of the ANC's national result there were several far lesser provincial trends. Credibly, in all but one of the provinces it emerged with commanding, although slightly dented, majorities. Its KwaZulu-Natal electoral support rose to levels that matched the wide (albeit, this time around, smaller) margins it had been attaining in other provinces, thus compensating for reduced performances in the other provinces. Close to one-fifth of the ANC's 2009 *national vote total* came from KwaZulu-Natal. The party managed to *increase its total number* of votes in four of the nine provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Mpumalanga

⁸ The campaign was populist in mobilisational style, and played on charismatic leadership while nurturing expectations of a new start, which would be popularly anchored and entrusted to a new ANC regime. See Booysen 2009a.

and Northern Cape), with its two biggest provincial losses compared with 2004 being the Western Cape (down by approximately 303 000 votes) and Gauteng (down by 331 000 votes). This was in the context that from 2004 to 2009 the total number of registered voters in the country had increased by 2.5 million (Table 1) to 23.2 million.

In contrast with these still-credible ANC performances in relation to provincial vote totals, the party's *proportion of the provincial vote* decreased in all provinces except KwaZulu-Natal. This signalled space ceded to the opposition across a diverse front. The DA's outright majority in the Western Cape was indicative of the reality that the ANC had retreated from being the strongest party in all nine 2004 provincial elections.

The ANC hand behind the modest 2009 opposition showing

The ANC shed support in 2009 precisely at a time when continuous electoral omnipotence had become pivotal to the party. It was involved in an electoral holding operation (potentially of long duration) while trying to make government work to such an extent that instrumentalist electoral support could be guaranteed to take over when the liberation dividend finally ran dry. Election 2009 showed that while the ANC remained electorally close to hegemonic, its results harboured potentially disabling contradictions.

By most indications there is a hiatus between reduced assessments of the ANC as governing party and the electoral support it manages to mobilise. One of the remarkable ANC strengths (at least up to Election 2009) has been the 'two-worlds factor' – its ability to isolate elections from the between-election periods of protest and outspoken anti-ANC sentiment. There is popular discontent with the ANC and the ANC-in-government. Yet the party remained shielded through both the popular distinction between the election and between-elections modes of expression and a 'time-lag factor' that continued to protect it against more pronounced opposition party advances.

An assessment of the ANC's 2009 electoral declines reveals a series of contradictions that highlight the likelihood that the party – while the time-lag and two-worlds phenomena hold – could, in future, win impressive electoral majorities that are increasingly at variance with its reduced stature as organisation and government. The incongruities thus also signal the potential for associated longer-term slippages in ANC electoral endorsements.

Six contradictions in the ANC's electoral repertoire summarise implications for a future ascendance of party political opposition:

- The campaign dynamic – extraordinary campaign tactics to do damage

control and forestall bigger losses: The ANC's official electoral demeanour was largely judged to have been exemplary. Yet, in the pre-code-of-conduct period it was often seen to have pushed the boundaries of the acceptable (Booyesen 2009e; Piper 2005). The ANC also mobilised intensely and rallied supporters in a renewed campaign message for hope and delivery by the ANC government.

- Dual repertoire of protest and vote support – anti-government protest did not foreclose on pro-ANC voting: South Africans in large numbers showed that protest in the between-election periods was not synonymous with a withdrawal of electoral support from the ANC. Communities rallied behind the party despite previously having protested against it (Booyesen 2007; 2009a).
- Socio-economic contradiction – ANC support despite continuous governance shortcomings: The ANC, as former liberation movement and now party that had been in government for 15 years by the time of Election 2009, had had insufficient impact on the crucial scourges of inequality, poverty and unemployment. This did not precipitate pro-opposition voting on a greater scale than, perhaps, the Cope vote.
- Cope – lightning conductor that took votes, but helped reinvigorate the ANC: Cope was both the first new black-anchored opposition party of note and evidence of ANC internal fall-out spilling over onto inter-party terrain. The ANC's vote setbacks in six of the nine provinces were largely due to Cope inroads. Yet without the push of Cope the ANC would probably have been less successful in re-connecting with and reassuring its grassroots support that its governance project remained on track.
- The results contradiction – national credibility courtesy of the KwaZulu-Natal feat: In 2009 the ANC suffered a reasonably minor (4%) loss in overall percentage performance compared with 2004. Without the KwaZulu-Natal correction of the province's previously sub-provincial-standard ANC support levels, the national decline would have been far more substantial.
- Post-election dynamic – 'Great election of hope' versus modest aftermath: The ANC fought Election 2009 on the wings of organisational and popular hope that the Jacob Zuma administration would bring new intensity, urgency and, where necessary, change of direction in ANC policy and

governance. The first year of the Zuma administration brought, at best, modest evidence of a gradual new project.

The relative ANC feats in Election 2009 were, to some extent, the result of a semi-change of 'regime' that was manifested in the replacement of Mbeki with Zuma and the installation of a Zuma-linked administration. The rising Zuma administration had the benefit of having substantially (albeit mostly disingenuously) distanced itself from the Mbeki regime of the preceding decade. Although it would be confirmed in the aftermath of the elections that ANC policies and style of governance would only change modestly (and changes that were significant had overwhelmingly already started in the Mbeki era), the Zuma-Mbeki split affected the election in its totality. Hence, the Zuma ANC gained from claiming to be different, promising to be more connected and caring, and signalling that it epitomised the entrance of the real liberation movement into government. *Should* voters have taken these undertakings seriously, as more than party political election-speak, they might experience disappointments. And, *should* larger numbers of voters in future elections decide to penalise the ANC for lapses in performance, this factor *could* have an impact on ANC electoral results.

These contradictions combined with the results and specific opposition party contradictions to suggest that the ANC was increasingly negotiating a harsh world of factors that could be carving away at its ability to sustain itself in commanding electoral positions. What was less certain, however, was the time it would take the opposition to capitalise on ANC vulnerabilities – or for voters to become convinced that opposition parties would better serve their interests than a flawed and sometimes faltering ANC.

CONCLUSION

Election 2009 confirmed that opposition party performances in South Africa had not yet emerged from the gridlock of inability to push the ANC into substantive decline. As the bottom line the opposition parties remained unable to push the ANC substantially below the two-thirds mark. There was continuous movement on the opposition party front. The strongest of the established opposition parties, the DA, progressed – but in provincially and demographically-constrained ways. New opposition parties, and especially Cope, drew votes from the ANC base, but were vulnerable to ANC retaliation. Thus, for four elections in a row opposition parties failed in their mission to subvert or daunt the ANC.

Results suggested that the opposition parties had achieved the *containment* of the ANC – given the party's national four per cent decline, its (modest) retreat in eight of the nine provinces, and a range of contradictions that undergirded its

otherwise exceptional election performances. These changes potentially mapped the road for future opposition party progress. Yet, the *scope was small* and *momentum so weak* as to afford the ANC the opportunity to counter and recover.

The ANC's powerful election campaigns, in combination with extraordinary voter tolerance of its lapses both as organisation and as governing party, helped account for its continuous dominance in the party political arena. The liberation movement dividend was holding and ensuring credible status to the ANC while, instrumentally, the bulk of South Africa's active voters judged that the opposition parties would do no better. The ANC's continuous hold on state power further helped boost its image of 'the party that stays in command and has the ability to act on election promises'.

Opposition parties were constantly unable to break through the protective cordon around the ANC. The analysis identified the 'time-lag', 'two-worlds' and 'parallel opposition' phenomena as pivotal to the ANC's persistent ability to defeat the opposition electorally. Together the phenomena constitute a cordon that intervenes between opposition parties and standard opposition party campaigns to sway voters. This protective barrier was constituted through voters not yet substantially penalising the ANC electorally for sub-optimal performances as party and government ('time-lag'). Voters tended to have their say in assessing ANC performances – vociferously, even violently – in the periods between elections. During electoral periods, however, they united behind the ANC ('two worlds'). Vibrant internal policy debates within the ANC itself, and among the ANC and its alliance partners, often substituted for engagements between the governing and opposition parties ('parallel opposition'). The analysis pointed out that while the opposition parties – in terms of policy, leadership and organisational afflictions – were frequently the architects of their own electoral misfortunes, this cordon continued to be the stumbling block in the way of opposition parties making substantial electoral inroads.

The article considered opposition prospects in the context of the SACP and Cosatu competing with the opposition parties for 'real opposition' status. On many occasions it had been predicted that the breakup of the Tripartite Alliance was the requisite step towards the emergence of a new party political force. Cope briefly suggested that *its* trajectory was the future of opposition politics in South Africa. Then it effectively imploded. By mid-2010 eyes were trained once more on the alliance partners as the source of a future opposition party that could do battle with the ANC.

The dynamic on this 'alliance split potential' front had, however, only changed marginally compared with either the Mbeki times of acrimony or the 2009-10 period of fallout in the wake of alliance member ambition to be the centre of power in the times of the Zuma administration. Evident changes were linked to

the ANC being noticeably under the strain of urgently having to deliver better state governance while simultaneously eliminating maladministration and corruption in its own ranks and across the spheres of government.

This task had shadowed the ANC for at least the preceding decade, since its National General Council meeting of 2000. In indications of new alliance division lines both Cosatu and the SACP were increasingly expressing themselves on the issues of anti-corruption and denouncement of self-enrichment of ANC state employees. These new Cosatu-SACP stances had the potential to speak to various constituencies across the prevailing party political borders. Yet the question remained whether the two alliance partners might ever become *so alienated* from the ANC and its Youth League protégés that they would cast their power into an opposition party arena where this new-left would, in effect, cooperate with conventional opposition parties to defeat the ANC.

Judged by regular peacekeeping measures within the alliance, intra-alliance contestation was not going to venture into party politics. The usefulness specifically to opposition party politics of alliance positioning and dissent thus remained uncertain.

It was clear, therefore, that Election 2009 and its aftermath only brought ambiguous opposition party progress. The ANC's wide margin over its closest rival – it had 49 per cent more national level electoral support than the DA – indicates that the piecemeal opposition party victories were still far from threatening the ANC hegemon. The new and continuous opposition parties also did not offer triggers that could stimulate support-pulling realignments. Dissent and opposition from the ranks of the alliance bloc were powerful, yet did not indicate that a breaking of the ranks was in the offing. The core quest remained control over the ANC, rather than electoral challenges to it. This was the name of South Africa's opposition game, *circa* 2010.

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